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A LETTER TO ROBERT HERON, Esq.

[JOHN PINKERTON]

Containing a Few

BRIEF REMARKS

ON HIS

LETTERS of LITERATURE:

BY ONE OF THE

BARBAROUS BLOCKHEADS

OF THE

LOWEST MOB,

Who is a true Friend to Religion and a sincere Lover of Mankind.

"Every Trifle is important to Man; himself a Trifle, "and his Life a Trifle." HERON.

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PREFACE
TO THE
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WHEN a man of ſound learning and acknowledged abilities takes upon him to treat in the moſt illiberal manner, and with the moſt pointed contempt, his equals, his ſuperiors, and every claſs of men, who, having juſt *folly* enough to judge for themſelves, and *ignorance* enough to contemn religion, do not, in all reſpects, think as he does, we are naturally led to ſuppoſe, that he muſt be deficient in ſome grand article of univerſal importance; and that he unhappily entertains too high an opinion of himſelf to diſcover wherein the deficiency conſiſts.

The peculiar and characteriſtic deficiency, in the author of "Letters of Literature," appears to conſiſt in a total want of *univerſal candour and civility*, and in a frequent abſence of, or departure from, *common ſenſe*. But,

When a writer looks on himſelf to be poſſeſſed of uncommon abilities, he will find it neceſſary to exert himſelf with uncommon addreſs before he will be able to induce others to view him in the ſame favourable light. And, if he is himſelf a convert to opinions which are not in general eſteem, he will find, that an univerſal contempt for thoſe who differ from him will go but a little way in the buſineſs of *rooting out* what he may call vulgar errors. —— And if, relying on the ſuperiority of his own talents and acquiſitions, he has courage enough

openly to attack the public faith, — to call in queſtion the authenticity of divine revelation, — to point out the apparent inconſiſtencies that are to be met with in every ſcripture-hiſtory, and the ſeeming abſurdity of the doctrines it inculcates, — yet, when he has done all, he does but hold forth to the world a convincing proof of his own inability to judge of matters of ſuch vaſt importance; and, while he zealouſly declares in favour of atheiſm, deiſm, or infidelity, he never fails of betraying as much *real* inconſiſtency and abſurdity, in his manner of treating and ſupporting the cauſe he undertakes to defend and maintain, as there can be *apparent* inconſiſtency or abſurdity in the cauſe which he is warmly ſtriving to invalidate. The rules, by which he conducts his enquiries, are ſuch as circumſtances require: of courſe they can lead to no clear conviction, for they reſt on no ſolid principles; and, while the ſophiſt appears to be only diſputing the authenticity o revelation, he cannot be far from queſtioning the exiſtence of God. But, before I proceed,

It may not be improper to premiſe, that the writer of the following *Remarks* is no *literary ſwindler*.* Fame and reputation as an author have not yet been any object of his purſuit. — He has always written, as he has thought, from the heart. He has formed no intimacy or connection with the printers of newſpapers, magazines, reviews, or other periodical works. Of the reviews he is a conſtant reader; and he verily believes that the editors of them are above ſacrificing their judgement to their intereſt. In former

* See the character of a literary ſwindler, given by Mr. Heron, in Letter 2d of Letters of Literature.

former publications he has himſelf experienced their candour, and he has alſo experienced their reproof; but he was not to be diſpleaſed or offended becauſe other men differed in opinion from him, eſpecially when their objections were ſtated with decency, and their ſentiments delivered with candour and good ſenſe, free from any mixture of incivility and contempt.—It is the ſelf-ſufficient critic, who gives no quarter, and who allows no merit, to thoſe who entertain opinions different from his own, that deſervedly draws on himſelf the cenſure of a juſtly-offended public. It is he, who, with a degree of contempt which no learning can juſtify, confidently preſumes to ſet up his own opinions as the only proper ſtandard of truth:—it is he, who, with little argument, and leſs good manners, accompanied with an air of majeſty which no ſuperiority of knowledge can render pleaſing, publicly attempts to give laws to other men's judgement, and raſhly pronounces every perſon, who holds doctrines different from thoſe which he himſelf hath condeſcended to receive as true, to be either leſs enlightened than himſelf or more expoſed to the baneful influence of prejudice:—whoſe pretenſions to ſuperior literary merit ſhould be carefully examined, and publicly approved or condemned. To the *judicious* and *impartial* reviewers the world is perhaps more indebted than we are aware of. My endeavour has been to profit by the juſtneſs of their obſervations; — and, although I can aſſure my reader, that I never entertained the moſt diſtant idea of purchaſing their favour by offering them any thing for the trouble of labouring through the few pages I have

have written, yet I cannot but think, that the reviewers ought to be preſented with one copy, at leaſt, of every work that is publiſhed, as a trifling compenſation for their trouble of peruſing it, and pronouncing their opinion concerning its merits and defects. For every learned and impartial reviewer is, in my opinion, a perſon highly deſerving public ſupport and private eſteem; — and the reviews, when properly conducted, are not only calculated to afford inſtruction and amuſement to the private reader of them, but they are alſo, in a variety of inſtances, conducive to the public good. — May the editors and conductors of them labour to deſerve the reputation they have acquired; and may they meet with every encouragement which their good ſervices entitle them to look for. But, to return, —

Does the Chriſtian repine, becauſe there are ſome things recorded in the ſacred writings which are difficult and hard to be underſtood? whither would he flee for ſatisfaction? The Chriſtian may meet with difficulties; but the deiſt, the infidel, and the ſceptic, muſt meet with many more; and, as their difficulties are greater, ſo their inconſiſtencies and abſurdities are more fooliſh and inexcuſable.

To point out only a few of the inconſiſtencies and abſurdities which the author of Letters of Literature hath unhappily fallen into, and to turn thoſe arguments againſt himſelf which he hath made uſe of to invalidate the truth of the Chriſtian religion, is the principal intention of the following Remarks. That they may prove uſeful to the true intereſts of religion, and to the pureſt happineſs of mankind, is the ſincere wiſh of the AUTHOR.

A

LETTER, &c.

SIR,

IN addreſſing myſelf to you, I wiſh to pay you every reſpect that is due to your ſuperior rank in life, and to your ſuperior learning and abilities. But, while I am expreſſing my deſire to pay you the tribute that is due to you, I cannot omit to declare my readineſs to pay a ſimilar tribute of reſpect and attention to every other man, and to every claſs of men, as well as to yourſelf.

At preſent, Sir, I ſtand forth the feeble champion of that claſs of men, which you have, with as much politeneſs as good-ſenſe, diſtinguiſhed by the honourable appellation of the MOB.

The MOB, Sir, according to the uſe you have made of the term, comprehends every man who is not a philoſopher; or, more plainly, it comprehends every man who does not underſtand philoſophy well enough to contemn and diſcard religion. It is, however, ſome ſatisfaction to find, that a perſon of your ſuperlative learning and abilities ſhould condeſcend to acknowledge, that the world is indebted to that religion, which men of your erudition muſt neceſſarily reprobate, for that peace and good order of ſociety which conſtitute its chief happineſs. Religion, then, does ſome good; for it is, you ſay, " the only bond of ſociety for the

" mob,

" mob, and they ought not to ſuſpect that " their ſuperiors deſpiſe it." Excellent man! And could you make ſo grating a conceſſion as to allow that religion is productive of ſome good! Qualified as the conceſſion is, and aukwardly as it appears to have fallen from your pen, we can but thank you for it. —— Henceforth we will not, becauſe you ſay we ought not, ſuſpect that you deſpiſe it; well knowing, that an object, which is treated with contempt and deriſion, is not far from being both hated and deſpiſed. Yet, notwithſtanding the noble frankneſs of your conceſſion, it cannot ſurely be imagined, by any being inferior to yourſelf in philoſophical diſquiſitions, that our ignorance of moral theory, great as it is, can be ſo very great as to ſuffer us to ſuppoſe, that you have no laws, and conſequently that we ought to have none, as you haſtily and erroneouſly ſuppoſed that it would. No! The only poſſible inference, ariſing from the aſſertion before us, is, that you, in the progreſs of

your learned excurſions, have moſt fortunately paſſed the throne of the Creator of the world, and are now ſafely arrived at the more rational, glorious, and exalted, manſions of the genius of true philoſophy; where mortals of an inferior claſs, like the ignorant, humble, and obſcure, writer of this letter, dare not approach to pay our homage or to make our congratulations.

Here the gulph is fixed by the maſterly hand of a philoſopher and a critic; and he, who, from this time, ſhall aſpire to obtain a ſeat among men of ſound learning and univerſal erudition, muſt take eſpecial care to thruſt religion out of his way; for, as philoſophy will never do for the vulgar, ſo religion will never do for the learned. The one are too wiſe to become fools; the other too fooliſh to become wiſe,

" The

" The vulgar," you ſay, (after having premiſed that philoſophy will never do for them,) " muſt be bound in the chains of prejudice, " and ſo led through the road of life; and not " truſted to themſelves after proper informa- " tion." Excellent advice! liberally conceived! and liberally beſtowed! Here it is certainly difficult to ſay which we ought moſt to admire, — the extenſive and diſintereſted generoſity of your mind, the amiable benevolence of your ſentiments, or the univerſal philanthropy of your heart!

Philoſophy will never do for the vulgar; for it will teach them, that religion is prieſtcraft, and Chriſtianity a deluſion. It is not neceſſary to aſſert that you ſay this in expreſs terms; it is ſufficient to obſerve that what you do ſay implies as much; and, when the inference to be deduced is clear and indubitable, it matters not whether

whether it is gathered from expreſs terms, or whether it follows by regular deduction.

Philoſophy will never do for the vulgar; for the vulgar have neither abilities nor capacities like their ſuperiors. They poſſeſs not the advantages of a liberal education and claſſical knowledge; nor is it proper they ſhould, for then *they* would ſhake off the prejudices of religion as well as ourſelves, and aſſert *their* right to judge for themſelves as well as we. But our ſpeculative theory of morals would never have a ſufficient influence on them. We muſt not, therefore, ſuffer them to trifle with religion, whatever we ourſelves may do; for, although we are too well acquainted with the art of reaſoning, and the principles of philoſophy, to regard religion as a means of procuring any happineſs to man hereafter, yet we ſhould deſerve to be called wretched moraliſts indeed, if we did not endeavour to enforce, on the minds of the vulgar, the neceſſity of obſerving its laws, ſo far

as

as it might be expedient to do, in order to ſecure our own private intereſt and happineſs, and the peace and good order of ſociety. But, if the chain, by which we now keep them in ſubjection, ſhould be once broken, they would have effrontery enough to claim a right to the title of rational beings. They would then no longer ſuffer themſelves to be tamely led through the road of life, like a lamb to the ſlaughter. — They would enter the liſts, which their ſuperiors, as you obſerve, have already entered before them; and, like them, they would nobly fight for the glorious cauſe of infidelity. Happy reformation! when the once vulgar and illiterate may be truſted to themſelves without any limited information being preſcribed beyond which it would be dangerous for them to paſs; when they may be entitled, like the author of "Letters of Literature," to think highly of themſelves and ſcornfully of the reſt of mankind.

"The

" The conſolations of human life," you " juſtly obſerve, " are by no means too nume- " rous." You go on to ſay, that " Religion is " one of the chief of thoſe conſolations to " thouſands of people; and, among theſe, to " many poſſeſſed of qualities ſuperior to genius, " knowledge, or philoſophy; qualities, that " conſtitute the GOOD, the firſt order, of ſo- " ciety. Shall I," continue you, " with raſh " and ſacrilegious hand, burſt open the temple " of their happineſs, and ſteal away the palla- " dium of their peace? Forbid it, humanity! " Forbid it, even philoſophy! The philoſo- " phy, that is not benevolent, is falſe and de- " ſtructive." That you are not abſolutely in- ſenſible to the ſalutary influence of religion, on thouſands of people, muſt be matter of un- ſpeakable conſolation to every reader who is weak enough to ſuppoſe that you are really in- veſted with the omnipotence which you make ſo graceful a diſplay of.

You

You have allowed, that numbers of people poſſeſs qualities ſuperior to genius, to knowledge, or to philoſophy; and, having allowed thus much of what you ſuppoſe to be true, you haſten to inform them, for their ſouls' health, that you, by the aid of your ſuperior talents and unparallelled knowledge of philoſophy, could burſt open the temple of their happineſs, break in ſunder the chains of religious prejudice by which they are now led peaceably through life, unfold the prepoſterous deluſions of revealed religion, and ſteal away the God in whom they believe, and from whom they foolifhly think they derive all the comforts and conſolations of life. What inexpreſſible thanks do we owe thee, O thou mightieſt among men, when we conſider with what fervency thou calleſt on humanity and philoſophy to forbid thee from entering on ſo dreadful an enterprize! May humanity and philoſophy

hear thy prayer; and, in this inſtance, may they grant thee thy requeſt!

" The philoſophy, that is not benevolent, " is falſe and deſtructive." This conceſſion partakes of the nature of an after-thought. — Tranſported by your zeal, and by a very pompous and enthuſiaſtic opinion of your own ſupreme omnipotence, into the ſhapeleſs regions of atheiſm, you arrogantly uſurp the ſtrongeſt pretenſions to a power, which, happily, exiſts only in the imagination of thoſe who ſay, in their heart, *there is no God.* It is not the atheiſt, notwithſtanding all his vain pretenſions to ſuperior wiſdom and unlimited power, who can, when he pleaſes, burſt open the temple of our happineſs, or ſteal away (honourable as the employment may be) the palladium of our peace.

After expoſtulating with yourſelf, whether you ſhould exerciſe the power, you affect to poſſeſs, of bereaving thouſands of people of their

their chief happineſs, you, very opportunely, recollect, that every attempt to deſtroy the happineſs of mankind is a certain ſign of falſe philoſophy; and, with an addreſs peculiarly happy, after giving us a proper notion of your boundleſs power, you endeavour to impreſs our minds with a favourable opinion of your extreme goodneſs. But,

The final cloſe of this curious letter is yet to come. "It is impoſſible for man to know "the truth; but it is of no importance whe- "ther his felicity be founded on truth or on "deluſion." Admirable logician! Having tampered with religion, and given the world to underſtand, that it is, in reality, a mere creature of the imagination, beneath the attention of men of learning, and fit only for the vulgar mob,—for men of weak heads and ſhallow capacities,—you openly proceed, with the ſagacity of a philoſopher too wiſe for the age in which he lives, and the boldneſs of an atheiſt

too proud to acknowledge a being ſuperior to himſelf, to ruſh into the field of ſcepticiſm and infidelity, regardleſs of the felicity of thouſands of thy fellow-creatures.

Were wonder any thing more than a pauſe of reaſon, we ſhould doubtleſs ſtand amazed to find, that the ſame wiſe and learned profeſſor of true philoſophy, who, in one page, exerts all his powers to make us believe that he ſhudders at the thought of burſting open the temple of our happineſs, and ſtealing away the palladium of our peace, and who, to all appearance, fervently invokes both humanity and philoſophy to prevent him from executing a buſineſs which he appears to have no inherent diſinclination to perform, ſhould, in another, be zealouſly engaged in turning both reaſon (which is the very baſis of all philoſophy) and religion upſide down. But a genius like yours needed not to be told, that, if you could

could but take away the foundation, the ſuperſtructure muſt inevitably fall.

To a perſon leſs learned than yourſelf it might appear unneceſſary to enquire whether your aſſertion, that "It is impoſſible for man "to know the truth," will ſtand the teſt of a trifling examination. I ſhall therefore only obſerve, that the book, I have been reading, is intitled — "Letters of Literature, by "Robert Heron, Eſq." It is probable you wrote thoſe letters; you may poſſibly aſſert that you did; but it is impoſſible for me to know that you did, becauſe it is impoſſible for me to know the truth. They may have been ſuggeſted by the devil, and written by an amanuenſis of his; and you may unhappily have ſuffered a groſs deluſion in ſuppoſing that you were either the author or the writer of them. For, if you mean any thing when you ſay it is impoſſible for man to know the truth, you mean that it is impoſſible for him to know the truth

truth by its proper evidence; and, without this, no man, who is endued with a ſingle grain of common ſenſe, will ſuppoſe that it can be known.

In order, however, to make ſome amends for the conſternation you ſeemed aware that you ſhould occaſion in weak minds, by declaring that it is impoſſible for man to know the truth, you wiſely tell him, that "It is of no "importance whether his felicity be founded on "truth or on deluſion." This is an aſſertion which does equal honour to your head and your heart; it is a ſpecimen of the ſublime which Lucan himſelf could never have excelled. It is confeſſedly a conception which has no ſuperior. The thought is great and vaſt beyond all deſcription. We muſt pauſe a moment to admire the philoſopher, ere we can proceed to inveſtigate his doctrine. And here it may not be improper to remark, that a proud affectation of thinking differently from the bulk of mankind,

mankind, and of being thought wiſer than the reſt of the world, is one of the chief cauſes of atheiſm. It was doubtleſs for this reaſon, that Plato, in his deſcription of the atheiſts of his time, calls them a *conceited* and *ſcornful* ſort of people. How far this deſcription of Plato's is applicable to the author of Letters of Literature is a matter, which every impartial reader of thoſe letters will be able to form a very competent judgement of in a very ſhort ſpace of time.

" It is of no importance whether my felicity " be founded on truth or on deluſion." That is, It is of no importance whether my felicity be founded on a belief that there *is* a God, or on a belief that there is *no* God; for, in either caſe, the concluſion is equally favourable to happineſs. If there is *no* God, and my felicity is founded on a belief that there *is one*, an eternal oblivion will cloſe this ſcene of action, and prove the only diſagreeable conſequence of my

my error. And, if there *is* a God, and my felicity is founded on a belief that there is *no* God, an eternal exemption from happineſs, not to ſay an eternal conſignment to miſery, will be one of the trifling conſequences of my incredulity. And, in either caſe, there is likely to be ſo trifling a difference in the final concluſion, as to render it an object altogether unworthy of the ſerious attention of any rational being.

Mr. Maty, as a critic and a philoſopher, tells us, that the young men of the preſent age may read Mr. Paley and be *ſaved*. With equal propriety, I, as a friend to religion and a lover of mankind, may ſay, that the young men of the preſent age may read Mr. Heron and be *damned*. And, ſhould this be the caſe, it would be but a trifle. But every trifle, it muſt be obſerved, is important to man. Why? Becauſe he " himſelf is a trifle, and his life is " a trifle." The proper inference is: all that he

he knows is trifling, and all that he writes is trifling: witneſs your Letters of Literature and my remarks on them.

You tell your friend, that he cannot imagine how eaſy it is for a blockhead to ſneer at erudition. Give me leave to tell him, that it is juſt as eaſy as it is for an atheiſt to ſneer at religion. While you are noticing the faults of others, turn not a deaf ear to him who would remind you of your own.

" Is not a rich man" (you aſk) " better qua-
" lified to furniſh a banquet that will delight
" every palate than one whoſe poverty fruſ-
" trates his intention?" Yes, certainly! but it does not follow that he is more willing to do it, or that he is a better judge of the taſte of his intended gueſts, than his poor neighbour might be. As a man of learning, you are a better judge of the works of genius and of the beauties of compoſition than your ignorant neigh-

bour can be ſuppoſed to be; but it does not follow that you are a better judge of truth, when it comes recommended and ſupported by its proper evidence, than your unlettered neighbour is. You have furniſhed a repaſt for the literary world; but you have not provided a ſingle diſh to regale and delight the palates of the religious part of it.

" A man of true learning, by the digeſtion " of a ſtrong mind, converts" (you ſay) " all " literary food into wholeſome nouriſhment." Are you a man of true learning? If ſo, you have excluded religion from your banquet, as a food which the ſtrongeſt minds are leaſt capable of converting into wholeſome nouriſhment.

" In England," (you ſay,) " the barbarous " blockheads of the loweſt mob" (language claſſically elegant and refinedly polite) " have " corrupted and degraded the language; and " it is ridicule for a man qualified to judge of it

" even

" even to give it a new ſpelling." And, " ſince the time of Milton, no writer" (you obſerve) " hath had courage to bear up againſt " the vulgar; and the conſequence is, that " *the head follows the tail.*" Yet, " the opi- " nion of men of learning" (you tell us) " ALWAYS leads the mob, when it hath had a " proper period to operate." But, if no proper period hath yet intervened ſince the time of Milton, what number of years may we reaſonably and philoſophically ſuppoſe a proper period to conſiſt of?

" The opinion of the mob is *ſeldom* or *never* " that of men of learning, and in NO IN- " STANCE can *lead* it." How, then, can it be ſaid, that *the head follows the tail?* But contradictions, inconſiſtencies, and abſurdities, are like thoſe who write them; — mere trifles. They may raiſe a ſmile; but it is the ſmile of pity.

You ſay, " you deteſt the principles of any " man who writes popularly againſt the religion " of his country, let it be what it will, if it " does not hinder political freedom, the firſt of " human bleſſings." *I ſay*, I deteſt the principles of any man who publicly attempts to interrupt the happineſs of thouſands of people, and to leſſen the ſecurity of the crown, by openly and avowedly endeavouring to leſſen the influence of religion, and boldly denying the truth of that kind of evidence which alone is ſufficient to eſtabliſh its validity. After all, thoſe, who entertain any doubts of the truth of Chriſtianity, ought at leaſt to keep their doubts to themſelves until they have made a fair trial. Let them but ſearch the Scriptures, and make them the rule of their lives and conduct for a ſhort ſpace of time; and they will then be better able to judge of the doctrine, *whether it be of God or not*; or, in other words, *whether it be truth or fiction*. If they are not willing to make

make this trial, they ought at leaſt to leave the proof with thoſe who have made it, without endeavouring to wreſt it forcibly from them. — The proof of a true faith is beſt aſcertained by its influence on the mind; and it is much eaſier for an infidel to expreſs his doubts of the truth of Chriſtianity than it is for a Chriſtian to deſcribe the inward comfort and ſatisfaction which he continually derives from the doctrines he faithfully believes and the duties he conſcientiouſly diſcharges.

The two greateſt bleſſings we can enjoy here are, *peace of mind while we live* and *inward comfort and conſolation when we die*. Let each of us zealouſly ſtrive to obtain theſe bleſſings ourſelves, without ſpeaking ſlightingly or contemptibly of the faith of others; and let us endeavour to win others over to our own perſuaſion, rather by our goodneſs, our humility, condeſcenſion, and readineſs to aſſiſt them and do them all the good we can, than by endeavouring

vouring to weaken their faith, by inſtilling into them any extravagant, vain, and fantaſtical, notions of our ſuperior learning, wiſdom, and knowledge. So ſhall we neither injure the public faith nor diſturb the peace and happineſs of individuals. But,

When a man of learning is anxious to expreſs his contempt of any thing he diſlikes, he is never long at a loſs for an apparently favourable opportunity of doing it. Your criticiſm on Mr. Hume affords you a glorious opportunity of diſplaying your ineffable contempt of the king and the church. As you had determined to ſet your face altogether againſt religion, it would have been a miſerable proof of your ignorance, your cowardice, or your partiality, if you had ſpoken of kings with only a moderate ſhare of diſapprobation; for every body knows that the king and the church are inſeparable. "Hume was poor, and wiſhed "to be rich;" and this, you ſay, was the reaſon

ſon that induced him to proſtitute his talents ſo baſely as to affirm, that "millions of human "beings were to hold their life and happineſs "at the nod of one of them;"—"of a *thing*" (elegant compliment for a crowned head!) "called a *king*; PERHAPS," (continue you,) "in corporeal and mental powers, leſs than "the leaſt of his ſubjects." Well ſaid, Mr. Heron! Language would not permit you to expreſs your cool and deliberate contempt of kings with a greater ſhare of aſperity than you have done here. Your *perhaps* has enabled you to extend your line of diſreſpect as far as the powers of language would admit; it is ſuch a *perhaps* as I will venture to affirm never before entered into the head of any mortal being. —— Since the world began, was it ever before conceived, that one perſon might, in any age or in any country, with the leaſt degree of propriety, of truth, or of juſtice, ſay to another, *Perhaps the weakeſt and moſt ignorant of the barbarous blockheads of the loweſt*

mob

mob (to uſe your own polite, beautiful, emphatical, and elegant, language) *are, in corporeal and mental powers, ſuperior to the king himſelf?* But extreme ſeverity, like extreme wiſdom, is apt to defeat its own purpoſes; for extremes are always dangerous; and to be extremely wiſe is more nearly allied to being extremely fooliſh than we are *perhaps* willing to believe.

" The king is the ſureſt fountain of wealth, " and to flatter him is the path to preferment " and to opulence." To flatter men of ſolid ſenſe (like the author of Letters of Literature) is the ſureſt way to offend them. What, then, is the inference? Kings are not men of ſolid ſenſe. To flatter them, therefore, is the ſureſt way to obtain their favour. — You have too great a regard for kings to flatter them; and I have too much reſpect for them to contemn and deſpiſe them, much leſs to ſet them on a level with the weakeſt and moſt ignorant

of

of the barbarous blockheads of the loweſt mob.

" It was reſerved for the idiotic counſels of " this Gothic reign to cruſh all hopes of the " progreſs of painting, at once, by founding " an academy" for the encouragement and improvement of its profeſſors. " I know of " no ſervice which our royal academy doth, " but to ſpoil many good tailors, by convert- " ing them into *artiſts*, as they call them- " ſelves." We are here given to underſtand, that the preſent reign is a *Gothic* reign; that our counſellors are idiots; that the deſign of the inſtitution of the royal academy of painting was to cruſh all hopes of making any improvement in that art, and that the only ſervice which it is of is to ſpoil many good tailors. — From theſe obſervations, we are pretty plainly inſtructed to conclude, that my author has a greater regard for tailors than painters; that he poſſeſſes abilities better calculated to judge of

words than pictures; and is a better judge of his own excellence than he is of the excellence of others.

" It is to be hoped ſome future prince will " have juſt ſenſe enough to diſſolve this lump " of regal folly;" and to rear another more ſuitable to the taſte and inclination of my author, and of which he may be appointed governor and preſident. This is to be " an aca- " demy for improving the language of our " country." Its laws are to be arbitrarily ſevere; for " all the members, and all the lite- " rati of the kingdom, are to unite to aſſert " their proper power over the *mob*." But, ſhould they fix Mr. Heron on the throne of this academy, God only knows what power the preſident and the members may think proper to aſſert; or what means they, in their wiſdom, may be pleaſed to take to exert, eſtabliſh, and confirm, it. The doctrine here delivered, if I miſtake not, is *freedom to the painters* and *ſla-*

very

very to the mob. But let not the painters glory in their liberty; for, no ſooner will they enjoy it, by obtaining a diſſolution of the academy of painting, than they will be claſſed among the number of the vulgar mob, and, like them, they will be denied the privilege of ſpeaking their native tongue. The very *lullaby-baby* of a nurſe will be ſubject to a critical reviſal, and ladies of the moſt delicate conſtitution (if they would avoid a diſhonourable flagellation) muſt *turn tail*, whenever this nation is bleſſed with a prince who has juſt ſenſe enough to inveſt a critic with a plenitude of power unknown to majeſty itſelf. Happy period! when the harſh and diſcordant *gee-o* of a ploughman muſt give place to the melliſluent harmony and enchanting ſoftneſs of the *crab-o* of a Heron.

" The king, my friend, ſhould incorporate
" one hundred, or indeed all, of the moſt
" learned men in the kingdom, or they ſhould

 " aſſociate

" aſſociate themſelves, under the name of *The*
" *academy for improving the language.* And I
" am the more deſirous to recommend a plan
" of this ſort, becauſe I am fully ſenſible,
" that the inſtituting academies of any *art* or
" *ſcience* is COMPLETE FOLLY."

In good truth, ſir, your letters are letters of ſuch extraordinary merit, that the moſt learned cotemporary can form no true eſtimate of them; for works of uncommon excellence, as you obſerve, require to be viewed at a *certain diſtance*, and in a *certain light*, to have their due effect.

You are, without diſpute, a writer of eminence, and of courſe you are not a writer of your own time; the public, therefore, muſt be contented to wait one hundred years, *or more*, before they will acquire intelligence enough to judge what you mean by reading what you write. What ſublime ideas occur to the human mind, when a man has humility

and

and fortitude enough to keep his eye ſteadfaſtly on his own *dear ſelf!*

I cannot conclude this long and (to my reader I am apprehenſive it will prove) tireſome letter, without remarking, that your obſervation, on the following words of Shakeſpeare's Hamlet, —

To die? —— to ſleep, —— no more? —

ſufficiently evinces your attachment to the dreary doctrine of annihilation. You do not approve of the point of interrogation. You ſay, "the meaning requires rather a point of ſtrong "aſſertion." I am rather inclined to think, that the meaning is not only much more clear as it is, but alſo much more agreeable to the ſentiments and feelings of the majority of the thinking part of mankind. In the moments of health and conviviality, death may be treated as a ſubject of trifling importance; and the young

young and unthinking part of mankind may adopt what I apprehend to be the true language of Shakeſpeare on the ſubject:

" To die? —— to ſleep!" ——

But, when a ſudden ſucceſſion of ſickneſs to health beſpeaks a nearer approach to the hour of their departure, they entertain different and more juſt notions of the important change; and a moment's ſerious conſideration will then urge them to change, with Hamlet, their former opinion, and to queſtion the propriety of their former haſty concluſion.

—— " No more?"

And is it, then, no more to die than it is to ſleep? Surely I now begin to *feel*, with the more conſiderate part of mankind, that it is *a ſerious thing to die*. This, I preſume, is a natural and a juſt illuſtration of the meaning of Shakeſpeare, and the point of interrogation appears

appears to me to be exceedingly proper; — whereas, ſhould a point of ſtrong aſſertion take place, as you recommend, the inference will then be, — that it is abſolutely no more to die than it is to ſleep. Now, ſir, if you can point out to me only one man, whether he be a Chriſtian, an infidel, or an atheiſt, who, in his dying moments, will ſeriouſly tell me, that he finds it to be a matter of as much indifference to him to die as it was ever to lie down to ſleep, I will ſubſcribe my name as an advocate for your point of ſtrong aſſertion. But, until you can enforce your argument by experience, I muſt beg leave to proteſt againſt an alteration which ſtrikes at the grand article of the Chriſtian's faith, *the reſurrection of the dead.*

If, at the hour of death, a Chriſtian has his fears as well as his hopes, it muſt be remembered, that the infidel, the ſceptic, and the atheiſt, have, each of them, their doubts and their

their uncertainties. And, at any rate, a change from Chriſtianity to atheiſm, ſcepticiſm, or infidelity, cannot contribute to the real and permanent happineſs of any man; there being no comfort, no ſatisfaction, no degree of happineſs, which a convert to either of theſe can experience, but what is, and always may be, experienced in a much greater degree by the pious and ſincere Chriſtian. Nevertheleſs, while the Chriſtian feelingly and experimentally enjoys all the bleſſings and comforts which his religion is calculated to give him, let him not haſtily give ſentence againſt thoſe who oppoſe his faith. Rather let him modeſtly continue in the belief of thoſe doctrines, and in the conſtant and habitual practice of thoſe duties, which he has learned and has been aſſured of, knowing of whom he has learned them; and let him maintain the faith delivered to him, in the beſt manner he can, conſiſtent with decency, with civility, and univerſal love, without preſuming to contemn or deſpiſe thoſe who differ

ſer from him. But, when the infidel, not contented with enjoying, in private, the fruits of his ſuperior learning, ſtalks abroad in open day, and, with all the ſophiſtry of ſcepticiſm, ridicules the common faith, and ſpeaks as contemptibly of his fellow-creatures as he does of religion, he becomes a common enemy; it is then time to look him in the face, to meet him in his own way, to examine his pretenſions to infallibility, and to retort on himſelf the various artifices he hath made uſe of to ſeduce us from our faith; for the greateſt erudition cannot authoriſe any perſon to give laws to another man's judgement. To the great God of Heaven (if you will permit me to ſuppoſe that there is ſuch a Being) we, each of us, ſtand accountable for our private and our public faith and conduct: and that Chriſtians, and all the race of mankind, may endeavour ſo to appear before him, that they may all be finally

accepted by him, is the ſincere wiſh, and ardent prayer, of,

SIR,

Your humble ſervant,

Feb. 23, 1786.

The AUTHOR.